DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 271 432 SP 027 736

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TITLE The Challenge of Change: Attracting and Retaining Academically Talented Teacher Candidates.
PUB DATE Mar 86
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (Chicago, IL, February 26-March 1, 1986).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Higher Education; Honors Curriculum; *Preservice Teacher Education; *Program Development; Student Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Education Programs; *Teacher Recruitment
IDENTIFIERS *SCATT Program; *University of South Florida

ABSTRACT

The SunCoast Area Teacher Training Program (SCATT) is an honors program for teacher education undergraduates in the College of Education, University of South Florida. Originally funded by the state, but now fully supported by the university, the SCATT Program has three goals: (1) to attract and retain bright, talented students in the teaching profession and to facilitate their development into committed, highly competent teachers; (2) to foster and maintain a positive attitude toward teaching and the teaching profession among program participants; and (3) to foster commitment and appreciation of academic excellence in education. The three major components of the SCATT Program are student programs, a clinical teacher training program, and job opportunity. This paper describes the SCATT Program and presents program participants' perceptions and impliciations for program adaptations at other institutions. (CB)

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THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE: ATTRACTING AND RETAINING ACADEMICALLY TALENTED TEACHER CANDIDATES

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SP 027 736

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, Chicago, Illinois
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ABSTRACT

The recent call for renewal and excellence in teacher education has forced many teacher training institutions to increase their efforts to recruit prospective teacher candidates from among the most academically talented in the college applicant pool. This report describes one institution's efforts toward that end.

The SunCoast Area Teacher Training Program (SCATT), an honors program for teacher education undergraduates in the College of Education, University of South Florida is described. Program participants' perceptions and implications for program adaptations at other institutions are presented.

INTRODUCTION

Within recent years public concern and dissatisfaction with the quality of public schooling in America has heightened. This concern has led such parties as the federal government, state and local legislators, and professionals in the field of education to focus on the various components of the education system. Since teachers play a central role in the education process, it is not surprising that increased attention has also been focused on the quality of teacher preparation programs and candidates entering these programs. Among the most frequently cited problems are those related to the academic ability of students who are being admitted into teacher preparation programs and the concomitant lowering of academic standards in some programs to attract more students (Weaver, 1979). In its 1983 report on the quality of education in America, the National Commission on Excellence in Education charged that not enough academically able students were being attracted into the profession, that too many teachers were being drawn from the bottom quarter of graduating high school and college students, and that teacher preparation programs were in need of substantial improvements (A Nation at Risk, 1983).

One way in which some Colleges of Education have sought to respond to these concerns and the call for renewal and excellence in teacher education is by their increased efforts to recruit prospective teacher candidates from among the most academically talented in the college applicant pool. Efforts to attract such candidates are regarded by many as an important first step in the direction toward improvement of quality in the teaching profession. However, such efforts will only be productive to the extent that they can keep qualified students in the program and continue to

attract such students due to the reputation of the program. This can be achieved most effectively through quality program offerings that are rigorous and challenging to the academically talented student. The strong wave of public criticism directed toward the teaching profession and the absence of an active support network to reinforce positive attitudes toward the profession could easily result in a high rate of attrition of the most capable teacher-candidates from preservice programs. Thus it is important for Colleges of Education not only to attract academically talented candidates to teacher training programs, but also to retain them in these programs and help them develop a sense of commitment to the profession that will ultimately lead to their entry into the teaching profession.

The College of Education, University of South Florida has acted in keeping with this posture. In 1981, it instituted a special honors program, the SunCoast Area Teacher Training Program (SCATT), designed to attract and keep academically talented students in the teaching profession and to facilitate their development into highly competent and committed teachers.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

SCATT was begun as a collaborative program between the College of Education, University of South Florida and 15 counties in the university's service area. It was funded initially by a special allocation from the Florida State Legislature and is now fully supported and funded by the University of South Florida. It has served as a catalyst for change within the College of Education.

Program Goals: The goals of the SCATT program are:

1) to attract and retain bright, talented students in the teaching profession and to facilitate their development into committed, highly competent teachers;

2) to foster and maintain a positive attitude toward teaching and the teaching profession among program participants;

3) to foster commitment and appreciation of academic excellence in education.

To achieve these goals, stringent academic entrance and exit standards have been established. SCATT students enter the program following acceptance into the College of Education (i.e., in their junior year). They represent all majors in education in the college. To qualify for admission into the program applicants must meet general university admission requirements and must have a combined score of 21 or above on the ACT, or 1000 or above on the SAT examination; or have a grade point average of 3.5 or above and be recommended by two or more professors. Requirements for maintaining membership in the program include attendance at a designated number of activities each semester and full participation in all program offerings during the semester of their full-time internship. To be designated a graduate of the SCATT program, students must satisfy all program requirements and have an overall grade point average of at least 3.2.

The SCATT program is not offered in lieu of the regular teacher preparation program in the College of Education, but rather complements it. The program offers a variety of enriching experiences, including seminars with prominent educators and opportunities for members to interact with other talented peers and professionals in the field. One of its unique

features is the concurrent training of a cadre of able classroom teachers to supervise SCATT students during their full-time internship. Both the content of the program and the process emphasize effective classroom performance, group morale, a positive self-image, and a positive attitude toward teaching and the profession. Beliefs about teaching are addressed in an attempt to help enhance teachers' decision-making behavior, classroom performance and future professional development.

Program Components: The three main components of the SCATT program are:

Student Programs. This component consists of two cycles. Cycle I takes place from entrance into the program during the junior year until the beginning of the full-time internship which takes place in the final semester of the senior year. The focus of the program in Cycle I is to provide SCATT students with a wide range of professional experiences that are designed to expand their pedagogical knowledge, and heighten their awareness of current trends and issues in education. In addition, they are made more aware of available resources in the community on which they can draw to enhance their performance as teachers.

Program offerings include seminars and workshops on topics such as a) Meeting Resistances in the Classroom, b) Education and the Legislature, c) Interpersonal Communication, d) Stress Management, e) Computers in Education, and f) Meeting the learning needs of the learning disabled from a medical perspective. Students also participate in a variety of field experiences that take them to educational settings reflecting all age groups and different types of programs within the university service area. Field trips include visits to such agencies/institutions as special education centers, museums, a center for the gifted, and a neo-natal unit at a local hospital.

Students play a central role in program planning and implementation. These experiences provide them an opportunity to develop and/or refine their organizational and leadership skills. In addition, they help to foster a sense of pride and commitment to the program and the profession.

Cycle II takes place during the final semester of the student's senior year when students serve their full-time internship. SCATT interns are placed with highly-qualified SCATT-trained clinical teachers for the 15-week internship period.[1] During this semester interns are also required to attend two weeks of intensive training workshops designed to develop and/or refine program participants' communication and teaching skills.

SCATT Clinical Teacher Training Program. This component is designed to provide training for carefully selected classroom teachers in effective teaching, communication, and supervisory skills, so that they may serve as supervising teachers of SCATT students during their full-time internship in the schools. These supervising teachers serve as role models and provide a support network for SCATT graduates in the field.

Training in communication skills is designed to refine the supervising teachers' verbal and non-verbal communication skills.

The training in effective teaching skills is designed to provide supervising teachers' with knowledge about current research in teaching, this includes intensive study of the effective teaching behaviors explicated in the Florida Performance Measurement System (FPMS) and the related research.

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1. Currently some SCATT students are placed with supervising teachers who have not received special training because of the need to have students in some schools at certain grade levels where a SCATT-trained supervising teacher is not available. The number of instances in which this occurs is being reduced each academic year as the number of SCATT-trained supervising teachers increases.

Teachers also receive training in the use of the FPMS observation instruments for use in observing their interns and providing them feedback on their teaching.

Training in the supervisory process focuses on the roles and responsibilities of supervising teachers and the "coaching" process for effective supervison.

Job Opportunity. This component is offered to SCATT students in their senior year during the semester prior to their full-time internship. It provides students an opportunity to gain additional on-the-job teaching and classroom administrative experiences with exemplary teachers beyond that provided in the traditional program. It also provides the school districts in which the students are placed an early opportunity to secure talented beginning teachers.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS.

Central to program planning, development, and implementation activities, is the need to understand the characteristics and interests of the client population being served by the program.

Based on our analysis of responses to a self-report questionnaire that is administered to all entering SCATT students, the following were identified as characterisitics/qualities generally shared by SCATT students. They have:

1) a history of belonging to special academic interest clubs/groups, honor societies, or participating in a variety of other extra-curricular activities during their high school years (e.g. the performing arts, and sports)

2) served as volunteers in community agencies and/or religious organizations during their high school years;

3) a history of academic success and were often recipients of special awards for academic achievement.

Between 80% to 96% of the students who enter the program in a given year report that they were involved in two or three different extra-curricular activities while in high school. Thus, it seems that in addition to being academically talented, the college students who are attracted to an honors program such as the SCATT program have a history of active involvement in organized, extra-curricular activities. This involvement allowed them to develop a talent, pursue some special academic interest or provide service of a social or religious nature. These students seem to have a sense of mission and commitment to some cause. It seems evident that to successfully attract such students into an honors program in education they need to perceive it as one with a mission and one that will challenge and foster among program participants a strong commitment to a cause. To retain them, the content must be academically challenging, and interesting. In addition, they must also be involved in program planning, development, and implementation.

Not all academically talented college students desire or feel the need to participate in an academic program which requires a strong personal commitment to a mission. Thus, it should not be surprising that there are some talented students in the college who choose not to participate in the SCATT program. The challenge to SCATT program recruiters is the identification of those academically talented students who would benefit by being a part of this program, or who could easily become disinterested in the teaching field because they are not provided with opportunities that will satisfy their desire to actively commit to a mission. The challenge to program developers is to provide program offerings that are academically challenging, and that provide for the enhancement of the program participants' skills, within the context of a program that motivates prospective teachers to be the very best.

Program Evaluation

Initial efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of the SCATT program have centered around program enrollment and graduation data, feedback from participants (students and clinical teachers) on specific program offerings and their perceptions of the overall program, and feedback from students as to why they choose to enter the program and why they remain in it. Data reported below cover the four year period 1982-1985.

Approximately 800 undergraduate students specializing in a wide range of areas in education have participated in the SCATT program. There are approximately 380 program graduates. The number of graduates increased from 48 in academic year 1981-82 to an antcipated 150 in academic year 1985-86. Over 600 classroom teachers have received the special supervisory training in the SCATT Clinical Teacher Training component.

Data obtained from program participents consistently indicate that an overwhelming majority regard the SCATT program and its offerings as being highly effective, beneficial, and relevant to their professional growth and needs.

Student Reactions

Students have consistently reported in their responses to course evaluation questionnaires that learning experience gained through the SCATT seminars and workshops

- are very beneficial to their professional growth. Respondents typically describe their experiences as professionally enhancing, academically challenging, and/or contributing to an enhanced self concept.
- have a positive effect on their classroom teaching performance in terms of improving their performance.
- are suitable to the professional needs of the intern or beginning teacher.

General comments written on these questionnaires also reflect that many students develop a more positive attitude toward teaching and the teaching profession as a result of their experiences in the SCATT program. In commenting on a pre-internship seminar one student wrote:

> "After these seminars I will approach my internship with a better understanding of my responsibilities and a positive attitude toward my profession. I feel as though I've had an injection of knowledge and a challenge to be the best."

Following is a summary of responses that SCATT students gave to the following questions:

Why did you join the SCATT program?

- 49% indicated that they joined the program due to the enriching experiences, comradeship and/or honor provided by being a participant in the program;
- 40% indicated that they joined the program because of their desire to acquire a higher level of skills beyond that provided in the regular college curriculum;
- 5% indicated that they were encouraged to do so by professors, advisors or friends;
- 2% indicated that they wanted a career lift.

What do you expect to gain from the SCATT Program?

- 70% indicated that they expected to gain a higher level of teaching skills;
- 28% indicated valuable group interaction;
- 2% had no preconceived notion as what to expect.

Why did you remain in the SCATT Program?

- 42% indicated that the program gave them a feeling of self-fulfillment and professionalism;
- 30% referred to the honor or a sense of pride in participating in the program;
- 25% indicated that they remained in the program due to the skills they continually acquire in it.

Clinical Teacher Reactions

The clinical teachers consistently regard the training they received in the Clinical Teacher Training Program as being considerably helpful to them in their professional growth. They report that the training enabled them to feel better prepared to work with their interns and helped them refine their own teaching and communication skills.

UNIQUE PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED AND WAYS TO RESOLVE THEM

After five years of experiencing the adventure of program development, the SunCoast Area Teacher Training Program (SCATT) has surfaced nationally by receiving the American Association of State Colleges and Universities 1985 Showcase for Excellence Award. It was the only winner in the category "Attracting More Talented Students as Majors in the Field of Education." Inherent in any fast-developing, successful program with extensive visibility is a high degree of excitement. This excitement is generated because the SCATT program draws from among the best students and faculty at the University. This combination provides the strength and creativity for the program to continually grow and succeed.

We are now dealing with a program of approximately 400 active student members, an alumni of 380 graduates and 600 clinically trained teachers. Another 120 teachers are being prepared annually. Consequently, dollars are dwindling rapidly. We were originally funded at $220,000 by the legislature in 1980. In the 1981 year, we received no funding, but were able to sustain the program by everyone giving and sharing, and through an administrative commitment to creative budgeting. Our funding was restored in 1982, but at the level of $197,000 because of a statewide budgetary shortfall. It has

been continued at that level from 1983 to 1985 as part of the institution's base budget. This year (1986) we received an additional funding of $100,000 for enhancement. Most of our dollars are allocated for salaries and consultants involved in program development or in the conduct of special seminars or workshops. This amount increases yearly thus giving us less expense money.

With our needs for materials growing because of the large number of students, we will be facing some serious decisions in the very near future. Unless our funding increases with expense dollars, our ability to provide special materials free of cost will be eliminated, as well as our ability to disseminate these materials to others. Hopefully we can remedy this problem with increased funding. Securing grants, unless they are very directly related to the goals of the SCATT program, is not the answer since the extra dollars are <u>not flexible</u>. These sums must be used for the project described, and we have found that most grants we have received have cost us money and an unbelievable amount of time and/or "people power."

The faculty that are involved as part of our planning and/or development team, or as teaching consultants are very supportive, innovative and flexible. However, because the program is offered in conjunction with the regular college program, we have experienced some difficulty in scheduling program offerings. In trying to arrange schedules for students, events and seminars, we do not always enjoy the cooperation of faculty in the College. In addition, sometimes supervising teachers, who have not been trained as clinical teachers, tend to resist the program because program requirements during the internship period demand that the SCATT-intern attend special seminars on-campus. In most cases, the supervising teachers

that complain need only a visit or call from one of our SCATT faculty team to explain our purpose. The problem is often one of communication. With faculty, it is not as easy to overcome the obstacles since there tends to be a certain satisfaction felt by some in complacency. The saving factor is having well-informed, polite SCATT students who try to communicate purposes and goals. Many times, the complaints are based on myth. The second solution is that of more involvement of college faculty in the SCATT program. We try to involve, where possible, the objecting faculty members in order that they become a part of the excitement. Most of the time this tactic works since the students really "turn them on."

The SCATT program demands the "extra mile." It is above and beyond the traditional curriculum. Consequently, it requires time, energy and effort from the students. We are presently trying to make the SCATT program either a special core program or special series of courses in our college to help overcome scheduling and other administrative problems. We are trying to accomplish this goal, but the "system" does prevent these changes from happening without time and trauma--meaning committees on committees studying and approving the changes! Our decision is now to seek a certification category for experimental programs and proceed from there. Developing and teaching our courses will benefit the students in relation to time and content. It will help the program monetarily as well, since we will be generating student credit hours (SCH) which will provide a new approach for negotiating for more dollars within the College and university. It will also provide a framework for more sophisticated research designs and longitudinal studies.

A problem not mentioned to date, but one that needs to be addressed, is that of the College structure and organization, and our presence. To do what we have done has personally taxed us and demanded a seventy to eighty-hour

work week at times. This has occurred because the system demands that faculty teach, serve, create and research simultaneously each semester and report to a department. In many cases the department members making decisions on faculty merit are not involved with the SCATT program. Consequently, problems have predictably occurred! Those faculty that were specifically hired to develop and implement the SCATT program are torn between securing tenure and promotion and fostering the purpose of the program. One possible solution is to secure a stronger commitment from all segments of the institution. The likelihood of this happening is questionable but not unattainable.

There is no doubt in our minds about the success and need to continue the SCATT program. The difficulties discussed will be ongoing, but we have become more skilled each year in problem-solving and intervention. We welcome honest criticism and discussion because we believe it promotes a better program for our faculty and students.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAM ADAPTATIONS AT OTHER INSTITUTIONS

We are engaged in a process of determining where we want the program to be both in the short term and particularly over the long run. We have thus developed a strategic plan which is to help guide us in determining the future status of the program as well as strategies and activities which enable us to achieve the desired status. This strategic plan will guide us over the next several years and will be modified as necessary as we develop the program. There are three major areas on which we are focusing at this point in time in terms of where we want to be as a program. These are reconceptualizing the program, developing an evaluation data base, and

designing a system for recruiting students. A fourth area, to serve as a catalyst for the college, is not a specific objective but it is an ongoing function of the SCATT Program.

Our strategic planning involves a process in which we clarify the mission of the program, the current status of the program, and the desired future status over the next several years, the visualized opportunities and problems that we foresee in reaching our desired status, and the specification of the strategic goals for the program. Clarity of mission is helpful in maintaining focus on the real objective rather than allowing the means to get in the way of the ends, that is, the process becoming the end in itself. For example, field experiences are designed for a purpose, they are not ends in themselves. Looking at the desired future status helps us determine more precisely what we want the program to look like rather than having it evolve through serendipity. In other words, it is more of a planned change. One cannot always ensure that it will occur but at least it provides a direction. Under visualized opportunities and problems we noted such things as the imminent severe shortage of teachers. This provides opportunities for program growth. On the other hand it poses serious threats to the quality of programs when emergency measures are taken to provide entry into teaching without teacher education.

Among our goals are the following:

to have a strong and clearly conceptualized program;

to have a comprehensive recruitment plan which responds to the goals of SCATT;

to have a funding base which is stable, derived from variable sources, and is sufficient to support program objectives;

to have a comprehensive data base and system which provides for monitoring, documenting, and improving the program.

An area of particular focus currently is to reconceptualize the SCATT Program. We have developed a number of successful experiences for the students which have received an extremely positive response. Because we have very highly academically talented students we must have a strong program to attract and retain them. The notion of retaining them in the program is very important, because if you do not have a strong program they would not remain in the program nor would they encourage others, so it is also a recruitment factor. This means the program must be exciting, innovative, and provide for the enhancement of their skills so that they feel they are receiving something of value to improve their role as an educator in our society.

This is not an easy task and it has taken considerable creativity to continue providing these kinds of experiences over time. We are now at the point of saying we have a good beginning, but we need to look more at the scope and sequence of the experiences. The way in which we are approaching this is to try to describe in total what the graduate of the program should look like once he/she has completed both the regular as well as the SCATT activities. We are describing this based on our conceptualization of what teaching and teacher education should be, that there are varied modes, there is need for an understanding of the various models of teaching, that there are various functions of teacher education such as the following four paradigm or models: a) behavioristic (stressing specific and observable teaching skills identified in advance); b) personalistic (focusing on the development of the psychological maturity of the prospective teacher); c) tradition-craft (emphasizing the accumulated wisdom of experienced practitioners); d) inquiry (stressing the issue of which educational goals are to be given priority, but not ignoring the technical skills needed to

achieve these ends). Given these conceptual orientations of teacher education as well as teaching, the specific program outcomes, which provide for a description of the graduate, are now being devised from them. We then can determine which of these are being achieved through the existing regular program or the extended SCATT experiences. This will enable us to project in the future the necessary experiences needed to complement what the graduates now get or what they will be needing in the future. This is an arduous process, but we feel in the long run it will pay off.

We also are looking at ways of expanding our recruitment efforts. We would like to provide a broader base of students in terms of geographic and ethnic distribution. We hope to attract students from across the country and to strengthen the state's capabilities for not only attracting individuals into teaching but attracting as highly qualified individuals as we can. This process involves a variety of outreach activities which we are now in the process of designing.

In terms of evaluation we recognize the need for a very strong broad based set of data regarding the effectiveness of the various components of the program as well as the overall impact. This is primarily to be developed in relation to the objectives of the program as provided by the conceptual framework of the student outcomes referred to previously. We also have a strong emphasis on outcomes of the program, that is, what the graduate would look like in terms of self perceptions, observations, testing, and perceptions by others. This multi-source outcomes data base would be an important added dimension which is usually neglected in most of our teacher education programs in the country.

Finally it has been found that the SCATT Program has served as a catalyst for change within the college. As new experiences were integrated into the program they were of such value and received such positive response that the various departments have found ways of integrating them into their regular programing eliminating their use as a complementary component in the SCATT Program. This has caused problems with SCATT in that it requires continually looking for new ideas but it keeps it vital and growing and it then also serves the general student population better. This is projected to continue over the next several years as we find new ways and are able to test these in the extra experinces in the SCATT Program before they are integrated into the total teacher program.

Implications For Program Adaptation at Other Institutions

A number of interesting positive and negative experiences have revealed some things that may be of interest to those wishing to look at designing a program similar to this. First of all we would say unequivocally that is has been a positive experience for the program, for the college, and the institution not only in terms of bringing recognition, but providing ways of injecting new vitality and excitement into the program as well testing new training experiences to improve the competence of its graduates.

Given that as a context it is necessary obviously to have administrative support for the program. There was outside funding in this particular instance for start up, but it has become a integral part of the institution's budget. Some of the concerns are that once you begin to develop a separate track, which may be part of, for example, the core requirements, you then draw the outstanding students into this new track and the other faculty are left with what they may feel are the "left overs."

This is a serious problem and we have not had to face that directly as yet since our programs have been above and beyond the regular track. Ways of reconciling that within the institution must be dealt with before such a move in that direction is contemplated.

In addition, there is a need for strong faculty involvement in a variety of ways. This program can be perceived as being isolated from the others and institutional jealousy can derive from this especially when additional resources are put into it, but by involving a variety of faculty throughout the college and the departments in various ways and working with them this can be significantly ameliorated. In fact, it may even be eliminated if done properly, but it has to be recognized as a variable.

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